

Palm Springs Self Guided Architecture Tour Itinerary

Begin at the Palm Springs Visitor Center, situated inside the 1965, Albert Frey-designed Tramway Gas Station at 2901 N Palm Canyon Dr. Take a look inside and chat to the volunteers about any questions you may have about specific homes, architects or things to do in and around Palm Springs. You may also find it useful to pick up a physical map.

Racquet Club Estates

From the Visitor Center, take West San Rafael Drive east into the Racquet Club Estates for your first glimpse of the Wexler/Alexander Construction Company Steel Houses. Designed in 1960 by Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison, these pre-fabricated, all-steel homes were to fill an entire neighbourhood. However, after seven homes were built, rising steel prices made further homes in this style, cost prohibitive. All seven homes are now Class One Historic Sites.

There are many other great homes in this area, many of which are Palmer & Krisel creations for the Alexander Construction Co – I've listed some of my favourite addresses below. Mid-Century Modern fans will be delighted with all the breeze blocks, vibrant front doors and occasional kitsch touch like a flamingo mailbox. In the Racquet Club Estates you'll also find the Hugh Kaptur designed Fire Station #3.

Steel homes:

290 Simms Rd

300 and 330 East Molino Rd

3100, 3125, 3133 and 3165 N Sunnyview Dr

Fire Station #3:

590 E Racquet Club Rd

Krisel designed homes:

325 Francis Dr

388 and 520 Desert Holly Circle

970 E Racquet Club Road

455 and 483 E Francis Dr (flamingo letterbox)

Chino Canyon/ Little Tuscany Estates

Cross back over to the western side of the CA-111 to explore the Chino Canyon and Little Tuscany Estates. Look for the 1951 Edward Fickett-designed Alexander-May House, built for George Alexander, co-owner of the construction company bearing his surname.

Be sure to stop by Neutra's masterful Kaufmann House built in 1946 – you know the one from THOSE Slim Aaron pics by the pool. Yes, if Kaufmann sounds familiar, he is the same department store mogul for who Frank Lloyd Wright designed Fallingwater in Pennsylvania.

Follow up with the rocky, cliff-dwelling, Edris House constructed in 1953 and designed by E. Stewart Williams. Almost directly opposite you'll see Max Palevsky House, the Craig Ellwood designed home created for the Intel co-founder, based on inspiration from a Moroccan walled home.

Finally, you can see just how timeless these Desert Modern designs through the three new builds of a Hugh Kaptur design in the appropriately named "Kaptur Court." Mr Kaptur is 88 years old and still active in the Palm Springs architecture scene as of July 2019.

Kaufmann Desert House:

470 W Vista Chino Rd

Alexander-May House:

424 W Vista Chino Rd

Edris House:

1030 W Celio Dr

Max Palevsky House:

1021 W Cielo Dr

Franz Alexander House:

1011 W. Cielo Dr

Kaptur Court:

262-266 W Vista Chino

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Vista Las Palmas and Old Las Palmas

Make your way south into the Vista Las Palmas estate and explore the collection of Swiss Misses designed by Charles Dubois for the Alexander Construction Company. Though they were nicknamed to their resemblance to a-frame, Swiss chalets, they were actually inspired by traditional Polynesian architecture.

The House of the Future aka Elvis Honeymoon Hideaway (architect unconfirmed) resides in a cul-de-sac in this neighbourhood too.

This neighbourhood is known for its many celebrity homes. I'll point out the ones with Desert Modernist architecture worth noting... enter the Dinah Shore Estate now owned by Leonardo DiCaprio, and designed by Donald Wexler in 1964.

The development of Vista Las Palmas was dominated by the Alexander Construction Co and business partner, builder Joe Dunas. Hence, there's lots of Krisel designs here to be spotted – again I've listed a couple of standout examples below. I'm also partial to the Merito Manor condos styled by Barry Berkus, with the folding plate roofs reminiscent of a Wexler steel house. Knock off? Maybe, they were designed the same year the steel house were built.

Charles Dubois' Swiss Misses:
755 W Crescent Dr
855 Via Las Palmas
797 Via Vadera

House of the Future (Elvis' Honeymoon Hideaway):
1350 Ladera Cir

Dinah Shore Estate:
432 Hermosa Place

Merito Manor:
193 W Merito Place

Krisel:
967 and 983 N Coronet Cir
1111 Abrigo Rd

Palm Canyon Drive

Let's cruise down Palm Canyon Drive for some more commercial buildings. For some reason I'm smitten with the Howard Lapham designed Rackstrom Building constructed in 1961.

Travelling south along N Palm Canyon Drive you'll find Kaptur's Farrah Building/Las Casitas Restaurant, along with the E. Stewart Williams-designed Oasis Commercial Building and Palm Springs Art Museum Architecture and Design Center.

You'll need to take a slight detour off the main drag if you want to see the main Palm Springs Art Museum building also designed by Williams. Don't miss the 1947 opened, Del Marcos Hotel, a William Cody favourite. If you can, the Del Marcos is a great place to stay while you're in town appreciating all things Mid-Century Modern. Continue to see the new build (2009) Krisel butterfly home at 421 S Cahuilla Rd.

Further along Palm Canyon Drive are the Alley Building (look for the BevMo!) by Luckman & Pereira, another Williams design – The Coachella Valley Savings & Loan Association (now a Chase Bank), plus two Hugh Kaptur designs, The Five Hundred and Musicland Hotel. There's lots more to see, so let's keep moving.

Rackstrom Building: 668 N Palm Canyon Dr

Farrah Building: 362 N Palm Canyon Dr

Palm Springs Art Museum: 101 N Museum Dr

Palm Springs Art Museum & Design Center: 300 S Palm Canyon Dr

Oasis Commercial Building: 121 S Palm Canyon Dr

Del Marcos Hotel: 225 W Baristo Rd

Alley Building: 333 S Palm Canyon Dr

Chase Bank: 99 S Palm Canyon Dr

Krisel (new build): 421 S Cahuilla Rd

The Five Hundred: 500 S Palm Canyon Dr

Musicland Hotel: 1342 S Palm Canyon Dr

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Tahquitz River Estates

Right after the Musicland Hotel, turn left into East Sonora Road to see the Joseph Eicher rebuilds happening in this street. Though developer (not architect) Eichler was known for his tract homes in northern California, these new builds based on original plans, fit seamlessly into the Desert Modern streetscape.

Eichler new builds include:

342, 398, 402 and 426 E Sonora Rd (there are now more, but I haven't been able to confirm addresses)

The Mesa/Canyon Corridor/Twin Palms Estates

Continue south into Canyon Corridor neighbourhood and check out the Royal Hawaiian Estates which were a Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison collaborative design. Travelling right to the base of the San Jacinto Mountains in The Mesa, sail by the Streamline Moderne home dubbed "The Ship of the Desert." The original designed by Earl Webster and Adrian Wilson, was damaged by fire. Never fear! The home was purchased and lovingly restored by renowned Palm Springs-based fashion designer, Trina Turk.

Make your way east on La Verne Way and you'll be close to the Insta-famous pink door and its equally colourful neighbours in E Sierra Way. The owners have requested that the door no longer be photographed, but a respectful drive by can't hurt, right? Just make sure you keep to the street or sidewalk. Then on to another Hugh Kaptur Fire Station, #4.

The triangle shaped area between La Verne Way and East Palm Canyon Drive is the Twin Palms Estates and is absolutely chock full of Krisel's. If you haven't had enough butterfly rooves yet, try Apache Road, Aquanetta Drive and Caliente Road.

Royal Hawaiian Estates:
1774 S Palm Canyon Dr

My personal favourite:
1178 S Lavern Way

Ship of the Desert:
1995 Cam Monte

Fire Station #4:
1300 S La Verne Way

That pink door and more:
East Sierra Way

Deepwell Estates

Venturing north of East Palm Canyon Drive you enter the former apricot farm, Deepwell Estates. First, you will likely pass the gorgeous white-washed Werner Hogback House, a Hugh Kaptur design. Continue onto Calle de Maria where you'll find various homes designed by E. Stewart Williams along with Donald Wexler and John Clark Porter.

Numerous developers, realtors and contractors lived in Deepwell Estates back in the day, so you know there's going to be some good stuff here. That includes the work of lesser known, but equally fabulous Desert Modern architects such as Stan Sackley who is said to have been another student of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin.

William Holden Estate:
1323 S Driftwood Dr

Sutter House:
1207 Calle De Maria

Werner Hogback:
1577 Calle Marcus

Fey House:
1120 S Calle De Maria

William Bogess House:
1366 Calle De Maria

Stan Sackley:
1131 S. Driftwood Dr
1475 S. Paseo De Marcia

Leo Koerner Residence:
1275 Calle De Maria

1325 Sagebrush Rd aka "Playboy Pad"

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Summor Estates/Enchanted Homes

Further northeast, towards the Airport are William Cody's St Theresa Catholic Church, and Palm Springs City Hall. City Hall was a star-architect collaborative effort involving Albert Frey, John Porter Clark, Robson Chambers, and E. Stewart Williams. Crawl these estate streets which are just brimming with late 1950s homes designed by Wexler & Harrison and Krisel.

St. Theresa Catholic Church:
2900 Ramon Rd

Palm Springs City Hall:
3200 E Tahquitz Canyon Way

Wexler & Harrison:
2928, 2968 and 2980 Plaimor Dr
260 N Airline Dr

Krisel
204, 205 and 206 N Airline Dr

Movie Colony

Moving westward we finish our tour back towards the main strip, in the neighbourhood dubbed Movie Colony. Pass by Frank Sinatra's Twin Palms Estate which was designed by E. Stewart Williams and is every bit as glamorous as you'd expect, down to the piano-shaped pool (check it out on Google Maps satellite view). You might also want to take a peek at Palm Springs Convention Center, the work of William Pereira.

Twin Palms - Sinatra House:
1148 Alejo Rd

Palm Springs Convention Center:
277 N Avenida Caballeros

Hidden gems

You may wonder why I haven't mentioned some of the most iconic and groundbreaking homes of the Desert Modernist movement in Palm Springs. That's because they're a lot more difficult to see than just pulling up curbside. Here are a few ideas on how to get a glimpse of these elusive homes.

Two iconic structures dreamed into reality by architect John Lautner, are locked up in gated communities. However, if you're willing to leg it up the Araby Trail, you might catch a glimpse of Elrod House (referring to interior designer Arthur Elrod) and Bob Hope House.

Frey House II is owned by the Palm Springs Art Museum, however bequest of the home to the Museum was conditional on it being used as a residence. Some fortunate staff member gets to call this place home! Occasionally tours are held around the property, but you'll have to jump on those tickets fast because it's a guaranteed to sell-out!